

Filmmaker's autobiographical story makes local premiere at Jewish Film Festival

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When *Made of Honor* director Paul Weiland was growing up in London, he felt like a forgotten child, trying in vain to get noticed in the shadow of his older brother while his parents struggled to keep their modest business from going under.

He counted on the one day that would make it all up to him. That would be his bar mitzvah, the day in Jewish tradition when he would recite a portion of the Torah and lead the service. That's when all eyes would be on him. That's when he would become a man and be celebrated with an enormous and elaborate party. That was in 1966, but it fell on the very day England's soccer team was playing in the World Cup finals, the most widely viewed sporting event in the world. Most of the guests opted to go to the game instead.

Four decades later, he made a magical coming-of-age movie about all that angst. Called *Sixty Six*, the 2006 film will make its local premiere opening the Jewish Community Center of Dallas' 12th annual International Jewish Film Festival on Saturday at the Studio Movie Grill in Dallas. Afterward, it will settle in for a run starting Sept. 12 at the Angelika Film Center & Cafe in Dallas. (For more on the festival, see Guide Picks in Out & About, Page 25.)

"It's the story of my life," Mr. Weiland, 55, says by phone from Bath, England, where he was vacationing with his family.

That is not to say he didn't change a few things with the help of screenwriters Bridget O'Connor and Peter Straughan, as well as an uncredited assist from Richard Curtis, who was nominated for an Oscar in 1995 for his original screenplay of *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. There's a fire that didn't really happen. The rabbi who taught him wasn't really blind. And most significantly in the film, his late father becomes a hero in a way that he didn't in real life.

"That's the thing about art giving life a gloss," Mr. Weiland says. "You can slightly move the pieces so you can have the ending you would have liked to have happened."

And yet, much of it is authentic, including the filming in his childhood home. Because his parents were so anxious about dirt, they covered everything in plastic and placed rugs on top of rugs, so what had been annoying for the child was a dream come true for the director, who found everything perfectly preserved for the movie.

His mother has a cameo, sitting in the synagogue behind Helena Bonham Carter, who portrays her. Mr. Weiland's kids are in the opening wedding scene.

You can see them in *Made of Honor's* church scene, too. Mr. Weiland is proud of the Patrick Dempsey hit about a best man who pursues the bride. The film, the most commercially successful of his pictures to date, also marked the last role for the late Sydney Pollack.

But he considers *Sixty Six* to be "the best piece of work I've ever done," he says. And, in a way, it gives him that special day he always wanted.

"No one came to my bar mitzvah when I was 13, and now thousands and thousands of people have come to my bar mitzvah," he says, referring to the moviegoers. "So I've put it right. It's a nice feeling."

The International Jewish Film Festival offers a mix of 11 films, many aimed at adults. *Sixty Six* and *Max Minsky and Me* (about a German girl too preoccupied with winning over a prince and making her school basketball team to study for her bat mitzvah) are family films, though *Sixty Six* has a PG-13 rating (for language, some sexual content and brief nudity).

• ***Sixty Six***: Saturday at 9 p.m. at Studio Movie Grill, Royal Lane at North Central Expressway. \$14 in advance, \$16 at the door; includes a dessert reception after the show.

• ***Max Minsky and Me***: Sept. 18 at 8 p.m. at the Angelika Plano, in the Shops at Legacy, 7205 Bishop Road, Plano. \$10 in advance, \$12 at the door. 214-739-2737.